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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TBILISI 000103

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PBTS](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)  
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: NEW DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS IN PEREVI AND  
AKHALGORI

REF: A. 09 TBILISI 2131  
[1](#)B. 09 TBILISI 2276

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kent Logsdon for reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary and comment. The EUMM reported new Russian requirements that local residents of Akhalgori (an ethnic Georgian city on the South Ossetian side of the administrative boundary line) and Perevi (in undisputed Georgia, but occupied by Russian forces) must have documents in Russian or English to enter their villages. Detentions continue in January, but the numbers are down significantly from December; two controversial cases involving a Russian asylum seeker and a South Ossetian security guard remain unresolved. The EUMM opened a forward operating base in Pasanauri, which will enable better monitoring of areas east and northeast of South Ossetia and outside the Larsi border crossing with Russia. The new document requirements, while possibly introduced for operational reasons (Russian officials probably can not read Georgian), could be a political step to reinforce the reality of the administrative boundary -- especially if the Russians insist on passports. They also impose an additional burden on local residents. The decrease in detention numbers is welcome and has extended beyond the expected holiday hiatus. End summary and comment.

#### RUSSIANS IMPLEMENT NEW DOCUMENT REQUIREMENTS

[1](#)2. (C) EUMM staff have reported new document requirements imposed by Russian Border Guards on local residents to access their homes in Akhalgori and Perevi. The two regimes are slightly different, although the EUMM has only been able to confirm the regime for Akhalgori. There, the Russians told the EUMM that as of January 15, if local residents only possess an identification card in Georgian (as many do), they must also have a notarized translation of the document into Russian or English for it to be acceptable. The Russians said their forces would have discretion to be flexible in individual cases for one month, but as of February 15, the requirement would be strictly enforced. EUMM Head of Mission Haber speculated that the new requirement did not reflect any political agenda on the Russians' part, but rather the operational difficulty facing border guards who cannot read Georgian.

[1](#)3. (C) In Perevi, the EUMM has reported that the Russian Border Guards are also seeking additional documentation from local residents; one step the Russians have apparently taken is compiling a list of individuals with ties to Perevi for use in making decisions on access. It is seeking to confirm rumors that the Russians will require locals to show passports (as opposed to internal identification documents). In response, the Georgian government has apparently begun issuing passports to local residents. EUMM staff speculated that the passport requirement in Perevi, if true, may reflect

the same basic operational difficulty of individual border guards being unable to read Georgian documents. Other diplomats at a January 14 EUMM briefing wondered whether the specific requirement that a passport be presented might have a political objective -- i.e., to make the point that Georgians are crossing an "international border." (Note: Although they have not done so publicly, Russian officials have in private conceded that Perevi is not inside South Ossetia, so imposing a passport requirement in Perevi would seem an odd place to make such a political statement. Akhalgori would seem the more likely candidate, but the Russians have not imposed such a requirement there. End note.)

14. (C) EUMM staff also noted that the Russians continue to refuse access to Perevi to staff from the World Food Program and UNHCR bringing humanitarian assistance; they must leave the deliveries outside the village, and the locals must come out of the village (mostly on foot) to recover the supplies. In addition, the EUMM reported that the Russians blocked a side path into Perevi (which local residents had until recently been using to bypass the Russian checkpoint) with barbed wire, thereby forcing residents to cross the checkpoint. An Estonian diplomat at the January 14 briefing asked whether the EUMM planned to take any further steps to encourage the Russians to leave Perevi. Ambassador Haber noted that the EUMM issued a public statement on December 11, the anniversary of the Russians' one-day departure from Perevi, calling on the Russians to honor their cease-fire commitments and withdraw from Perevi. He added that he would welcome additional engagement by EU member states with Russia on the issue.

TBILISI 00000103 002 OF 003

#### DETENTIONS DOWN, BUT STILL HAPPENING

15. (C) The EUMM noted that, so far in January, the number of detentions has been way down compared to December, when 67 individuals were reportedly detained -- although the EUMM cautioned that this number was based on compilations of press reports and unconfirmed. Russian Border Guards have made some temporary detentions, including on December 18 and January 2, releasing the individuals within a few hours. On January 3, six persons were detained inside Abkhazia; three minors were released that evening, and three adults were released the next day. On December 23, Georgian law enforcement officials detained an ethnically Georgian resident of Akhalgori for allegedly possessing counterfeit U.S. currency. On January 4, Georgian officials detained a Russian citizen who crossed into undisputed Georgia from Abkhazia; he was reportedly mentally challenged, and the Georgians returned him to Abkhazia in a process facilitated by the ICRC. The EUMM has been unable to confirm whether the individual was a resident of Abkhazia who happened to carry a Russian passport or a resident of Russia who happened to be present in Abkhazia.

16. (C) The EUMM also offered updates on two politically charged cases of boundary crossings. On January 4, South Ossetian resident Gennadiy Pliyev was detained by Georgian law enforcement officials for allegedly carrying machine guns and grenades. The Georgian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) announced he was detained in the town of Nikozi, just outside the South Ossetian administrative boundary; South Ossetian de facto officials announced Georgian officials crossed the administrative boundary line to detain Pliyev forcefully in the Shanghai neighborhood of Tskhinvali. The MoIA described Pliyev as a member of South Ossetian de facto "president" Kokoity's security team; announcements on the de facto authorities' websites identified him variously as an official with the de facto "state" protection service and a military serviceman.

17. (C) South Ossetian de facto officials used the hotline to

request EUMM in the case and (unusually) permitted EUMM staff to cross into South Ossetia to visit the site of Pliyev's alleged detention. After discussing the case with Georgian and de facto South Ossetian officials, the EUMM issued a press release on January 6 indicating their inability to determine the facts of the case, but calling for a special meeting of the South Ossetia Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) on January 11 to discuss it. The de facto authorities refused to participate because of long-standing concerns (see ref A). The EUMM interviewed Pliyev himself on January 6 and 8; he said he had drunkenly crossed out of South Ossetia to visit a friend and was detained on undisputed Georgian territory. He also told the EUMM he received a "mild beating" at the time of his detention, but since his arrival in a Tbilisi detention center has been treated well; he did complain that he had been asked to sign a statement in Georgian, which he could not read. On January 25, the EUMM released a second press release in which it announced "serious reservations" about the case. Based on its investigation, the EUMM has "serious doubts" about both the South Ossetian allegation that Pliyev was abducted and the Georgian allegation that Pliyev was carrying a weapon at the time of his detention.

18. (C) On December 21, Russian Border Guard contract employee Vitaliy Khripun left his post near Perevi (just outside the western boundary of South Ossetia) and requested political asylum; he remains in Georgia while the UNHCR considers his case (see ref B). The EUMM met with him on December 22. Russian officials activated the IPRM hotline in connection with the case, and the EUMM monitored a meeting between him and Russian officials on December 23. In the EUMM's judgment, Khripun will not drop his asylum claim. On January 21, the EUMM reported to diplomatic colleagues that Russia was increasing the number of Border Guards on duty at any one time in Perevi, apparently in an effort to prevent further desertions.

#### NEW EUMM FORWARD OPERATING POST IN PASANAURI

19. (SBU) The EUMM also announced that it has opened a new forward operating post in Pasanauri, along the Russian Military Highway north of Dusheti and east of South Ossetia, which would normally be staffed by one patrol (about four individuals). The new post, subordinate to the EUMM's Mtskheta Field Office, will allow better monitoring of areas east and northeast of South Ossetia and around the Larsi

TBILISI 00000103 003 OF 003

border checkpoint with Russia, if the Georgians and Russian agree to reopen the border crossing.  
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